

PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Bird and Wildlife Watching

Desired Experiences and Site Selection Considerations

Wildlife watching – and in particular bird watching – is often characterized as either occurring around the home or away from home (that is, travelling somewhere to watch wildlife). Many people participate in both forms. Bird watching around the home is the second most frequently engaged in outdoor recreation activity by Wisconsin residents.

Some birders watch and track birds throughout the year, feed and watch birds at their residences, and take trips throughout the state or country specifically to view birds or add to their “life list.” Although such enthusiasts often participate in other silent sports, birding is usually the primary purpose of their outings. High-quality experiences are characterized by uncrowded, quiet conditions where these birders can slowly move through an area with minimal disturbance to wildlife, other birders, and other recreationalists.

Other wildlife watchers participate as a secondary activity while hiking, bicycling, canoeing, horseback riding or other quiet activities. Wildlife watchers, especially enthusiasts, can be impacted by people participating in activities that scare birds away from an area, even if only temporarily.

Apart from possibly walking in sensitive areas, wildlife watchers create few impacts on the environment and typically have very few impacts on people participating in other activities. However, in some cases wildlife watchers can conflict with each other, particularly when people over-zealously pursue birds and other wildlife in ways that cause them to disperse.

Notable Differences in Participation or Opportunities Across the State

With the Great Lake shorelines and the Mississippi River valley as natural migration corridors, Wisconsin hosts an abundance of excellent birding opportunities. Although opportunities exist throughout the state, settings vary from remote, high-quality ecologically sites to more disturbed sites in agricultural settings. Even large metropolitan areas, most of which in Wisconsin are on water, offer interesting places to watch birds and other wildlife. Due to the number of people living in urban centers, most birding takes place in the southern and eastern parts of the state; however, the participation rate of residents is highest in the northern and western portion.

Notable Times of the Year of High or Low Participation

Wildlife watching occurs throughout the year. Bird watching peaks during the spring and fall migration periods. Birding around the home, particularly associated with bird feeding, is popular with many people during the winter.



Participation

Participation Rate and Frequency

Based on a 2016 survey of Wisconsin residents conducted for the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), it is estimated that 55% of adult Wisconsin residents participate in bird/wildlife watching around their home and 39% participate by travelling somewhere away from home. These ranked #9 and #16, respectively, out of 64 activities evaluated.

Days/year	% of People Bird/ Wildlife Watching Around Their Home	% of People Bird/ Wildlife Watching Away from Home
1 to 2	16	31
3 to 9	22	36
10 to 29	19	19
30 or more	43	15
Total	100%	100%

In terms of frequency, participants that engaged in wildlife/bird watching did so more frequently than participants in most other activities (it ranked #16 in frequency out of 64 activities evaluated).

Estimated Trends

Wildlife watching is projected to remain one of the most popular outdoor recreation activities due to the availability to participate close to home and while doing other outdoor recreation activities. The national participation rate was above 80% in 2008 and it is anticipated to be near 82% in 2030 (White et al. 2016).

Demographics

As can be seen from the SCORP survey results in the tables below, participants in bird/wildlife watching in Wisconsin are represented across the age spectrum and somewhat more rural. Bird watching is one of the few outdoor activities where participation increases with age and is particularly popular with retirees.

Bird/Wildlife Watching Around the Home

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	47	18
	30-39	55	18
	40-49	60	16
	50-59	57	19
	60-69	59	18
	70 and older	55	12
	Total	--	100
Gender	Female	55	51
	Male	54	49
	Total	--	100
Residence	Rural	61	54
	Urban	49	46
	Total	--	100



Bird/Wildlife Watching Away from Home

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	34	18
	30-39	38	18
	40-49	44	16
	50-59	42	20
	60-69	42	18
	70 and older	35	10
	Total	--	100
Gender	Female	38	50
	Male	39	50
	Total	--	100
Residence	Rural	41	53
	Urban	38	47
	Total	--	100

References

White, E.M., J.M. Bowker, A.E. Askew, L.L. Langner, J.R. Arnold, and D.B.K. English. 2016. *Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends: Effects on Economic Opportunities*. United States Department of Agriculture.

